

Wilderness Areas: Towards Recreation and Congruence for Research

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Abstract: The classic and contemporary literature about wilderness areas and the environment is full of accounts about the richness and rewarding nature of wilderness experience. The knowledge of wilderness usages has been enhanced by research in the field of outdoor recreation and excursion. The nature of this research has often quantitative, involving their characteristics attitudinal and other general response to the environment. The focus of present article is to emphasize on understanding of wilderness experience in context of recreation as well as considering about conducting research. The study of wilderness experiences is also important for conservation advocacy as they maintain and protect representative ecosystem. The present approach in this findings helps to fill the gap in our understanding of what is really happening between one's entrance into wilderness areas and one's departure from it that is a more systematic understanding of nature of experience itself. The present discourse reveals about wilderness areas with finding of following question were people satisfied because their expectation were met or satisfied because the experience was rewarding. Both expectation and rewarding experiences can contribute to satisfaction and wilderness settings.

Key words: *Wilderness Areas, Recreation, Excursion, Congruence of Research*

I. INTRODUCTION

The dilemma with such an approach of wilderness is that it leaves a gap in our understanding of what is really happening between one's entrance into wilderness and one's departure from it, that is, a more systematic understanding of the nature of the experience itself. In the context of the outdoor recreation literature for example, if research were to determine with their visits to wilderness, the researcher may have questions like were people satisfied because their expectations were met? Or were they satisfied with wilderness experience and was rewarding. Both met expectations and rewarding experiences, can contribute to satisfaction. Moreover, expectations may differ from one's actual experience. An understanding of the relationship between expectations and satisfactions can be achieved through enhanced knowledge about the experience itself. In a broader sense, if one agrees that management should not only be concerned with protecting the environment from harsh and/or sustained exploitation but also with providing satisfying experiences" for the users, then there is a need

for a better understanding of what these experiences are. This concurs with what Paterson (1974) noted that managers should understand the process by which users of wilderness areas evaluate quality. In order to satisfy the management need, measures of quality should be defined not only in terms of broad measures of abstract wilderness quality, but also in terms of the rich spectrum of variable attributes that constitute the wilderness experience and can be managed as level that control satisfaction. Similarly, Manning (1986) defines quality in outdoor recreation as the degree to which each opportunity satisfies the experience for which it is planned and managed. Present approach in article and some results obtained by massive literature over the past few years through involvement in this area of study from an environmental psychological perspective will be mentioned. This will provide a concrete and systematic look at a particular wilderness experience. The paper concludes by outlining the relevance of this type of information and research for management and policy formulation purposes, together with some more general considerations related to research focus.

II. A CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE

To understanding the wilderness experience is one which simultaneously looks at the individual and the environment. It concentrates on the process of this relationship and not on the characteristics of a wilderness setting and what that setting can provide the individual considered in isolation from each other. The human-made physical environment facilitates this type of interaction, and so also do the norms and conventions of the social environment (for instance, we can alter the arrangement of the furniture in a room and we can send verbal signals if we do not want to talk to others. This shift from changing our behaviour and/or modifying what is around us to the search for inner strength in the face of difficult situations, is a very important experiential opportunity facilitated by the wilderness setting. It is important because it can have tremendous psychological benefits since it forces one to confront oneself rather than to find some means of escape. A typical wilderness area represents an ideal case of an environment that makes no detectable response to the individual entering it. The wilderness does not react to a person, does not argue with

him (her), attack him (her), or fight back when attacked at least not in any discernible sense. More generally, it does not lock the person into a feedback loop, in which any response sets off a counter response (Wohlwill 1973). There is another important point about the nature of the interactions between individual and wilderness settings. This relates to the fact that wilderness facilitates what is termed here as clear and unambiguous feedback about the self (Scherl 1987b, 1988, 1989). In the individual wilderness interaction the 'non-responsiveness' of the environment permits one's behaviour to reflect back to the self. Thus the product of the interaction there is primarily a function of what one is doing; something which reflects one's individual characteristics, rather than how the environment is responding, or certain social or cultural expectations. This type of feedback is also facilitated from the social environment which may be a component of one's visits to wilderness. By and large, while in wilderness people are stripped of their normal roles and the 'status quo' apparatus which colours so much of one's interaction with others in day to day life. This informal atmosphere can facilitate feedback from others which is of a more personal and direct nature.

III. A RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

A further way in which knowledge in this area can be advanced is by systematic research into the nature of wilderness experience itself. The author has undertaken research on this topic. The research approach adopted was one where very few initial assumptions were made about the nature of a wilderness experience or what, indeed, was happening to individuals in that context. Wilderness was primarily operationalized in response defined terms; that is, the experiences people reported while in wilderness settings were examined. The research was conducted in the context of wilderness programs, one of many different ways people can choose to visit a wilderness environment. One should be careful, of course, not to generalize the results obtained in that situation to the full range of wilderness experiences; such results, however, provide some guidelines for further research. It is understandable that, for practical and ethical reasons, it is easier to obtain information about expectations and satisfactions (pre and post wilderness contact), than information about the experience itself while it is happening. This is particularly true when it relates to recreation activities undertaken in remote wilderness areas. Firstly, not all the researchers with expertise in this area would be keen and skilled wilderness users. Secondly, if there were enough 'keen' researchers there would still be the ethical considerations of interfering with others' wilderness experiences. 'Getting away from it all', a reason often stated for going into wilderness would certainly mean getting away from inquisitive researchers. The researcher needs, therefore, to be sensitive to this issue. One useful approach is to conduct research in the context of structured wilderness experiences. In this way a greater number of people can be accessed. Also, and ethically important, participants can be briefed about the nature of the research before their entry into wilderness, and be asked at the outset about their willingness to participate in 'on site' data collection.

One should be aware that research in this area will undoubtedly be interfering with participants 'precious leisure time'. Any method of data collection, and the instruments used, should attempt to avoid intrusiveness and make it meaningful to the participants.

IV. CONCLUSION

Implications for Management and Policy Formulation of Wilderness Areas: In the present discourse of evaluation about to argue clearly and convincingly that the nature of the relationship between individual and wilderness is beneficial to the individual seems particularly important. Until now this argument has been considered only sporadically in the context of conservation advocacy, at the expense of issues related to the biological integrity of wilderness. It is unfortunate that the quality of wilderness experiences and their beneficial impact on individuals often are still seen as intangible factors and on this account abandoned due to a perceived lack of more specific variables. In addition, it patterns out the complexity of a situation which is broadly and vaguely referred to as 'a wilderness experience'. The advantages for management and policy formulation would seem to be clear. Management can be geared to the 'experiential opportunities of a setting'. As populations increase and wilderness areas are placed under greater pressure, it may become important to ensure that the available wilderness areas in any particular region can satisfy all the possible experiential domains that a wilderness experience can offer. Experiential opportunities here refer not only to what one wants to get from an experience, but also the experiential states one would like to go through while in the wilderness setting. Wilderness should therefore be intrinsically respected in its own right, and not something which is there so it can fulfil our needs. A less ethnocentric approach where, from the outset, the focus is the reciprocal interaction between the individual and wilderness, is perhaps more compatible with a broader environmental ethic. The study of wilderness experiences is also important for conservation advocacy. Biologists can convincingly argue now that wilderness areas should be preserved because we need to maintain and protect representative ecosystems and species diversity. Social scientists should aim at arguing equally convincingly for the preservation of these environments on the basis of the maintenance and protection of experiential diversity and complexity. It is also worth noting that in the scientific realm, the advocacy of studying the 'experiential state' itself is gaining force, although it is more often voiced in the broader leisure studies context than in wilderness studies specifically (Mannell and Iso-Ahola 1987). If research is going to generate information which is useful for management and policy formulation, then one must take care to develop and encourage research methods which foster the type of information that can be best obtained from a specific population then one must take care to develop and encourage research methods which foster the type of information that can be best obtained from a specific population. An example of the possible usefulness of the general research focus advocated here follows. Say, for instance, that an organization which

manages an area of natural environment would like to know how information about ways of encouraging individuals to preserve that area, in the context of enjoying one's visits, can be best conveyed to overseas visitors). To guarantee more effective communication, it would be better for managers to have some idea of how this group of people experience that new natural environment. The best way, however, may not be to question them about their expectations as they may hold naive (or even no) expectations about what that setting can offer to them. They may, for instance, be visiting the area because they were told or have read that it is nice, and may not know much about it. A more appropriate method and research focus should be used to directly examine the type of experience one is having in a given wilderness setting.

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